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U.S. Asks Allies to Join Star Wars Effort; Technology-Sharing Curbs Unresolved

By Tim Carrington
And Roger Thurow
Staff Reporters of The Wall Street Journal

WASHINGTON—The Reagan administration formally asked U.S. allies to take part in its Strategic Defense Initiative, but U.S. concern about technology leaks to the Soviet Union may lead to strict limits on international participation in the program.

The invitation, contained in letters sent by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger yesterday, was the first formal step by the U.S. to enlist Europe and Japan in the $26 billion, five-year research effort known as Star Wars. However, Secretary Weinberger's communique didn't resolve the questions that still cloud the issue, including whether the U.S. will strictly limit the technology that can be shared with U.S. allies.

Moreover, the Pentagon hasn't spelled out whether non-U.S. companies would apply directly for research contracts or participate through some still-undefined agreement between governments.

Secretary Weinberger asked the countries to give the Pentagon within 60 days "an indication of your interest in participating in the SDI research program and of the areas of your country's research excellence that you deem most promising for this program."

He also discussed the matter yesterday in Luxembourg in a meeting with the 14-country nuclear planning group.

European interest in the research is driven partly by the desire to keep abreast of any technological advances that could have broad applications outside the military sphere. Manfred Woerner, the West German defense minister, said his country wished to participate in the Star Wars research so long as "fair partnership, full participation and mutual benefit" can be assured.

An executive with a West German defense contractor said he is worried that the Pentagon will relegate non-U.S. participants to *Blechschneiderei*, or metal-bending jobs, while hoarding the most significant technological breakthroughs.

Within the Reagan administration, there are sharp differences over how closely to guard the Star Wars technology. The White House, which is eager to lock in European support for the program, has been pushing for broad international participation. However, Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle, who is waging a campaign to stop the flow of sensitive technological information to the Soviets, may be reluctant to encourage substantial non-U.S. involvement.

Thus far, Mr. Perle has succeeded in expanding the items and technologies that U.S. companies are barred from selling overseas. With respect to Star Wars technology, Mr. Perle recently said that if shared research does materialize, the U.S. must make sure that "we're not relinquishing control just when it crosses the Atlantic." White House officials fear that stance could translate into obstacles to joint participation in the research program.

An executive with a major U.S. contractor on the Star Wars program said, "It's absurd to think that any kind of high technology will go to any foreign country" under the research program. He argued that in the past the Pentagon has blocked the sale of technologies "that are already available to the Russians."

The Pentagon's research into space-based missile defenses focuses on such advanced technologies as large-scale lasers, optical systems and kinetic energy, areas in which European companies are concerned about falling behind the U.S. "It's no help to European economies if we participate only where we're strong," said a senior official with the West German Foreign Ministry. "The question is how to participate in research where our firms are weaker."

But this official contends that the U.S. is increasingly working to keep its scientific findings secret. He believes the Star Wars program could magnify this tendency.

Ironically, one of the technological breakthroughs underlying the U.S. Star Wars program came from the Soviet Union. Gen. James Abrahamson, director of the program, recently told a congressional panel that the discovery in 1969 of a Soviet-made accelerator "is the key to our being able to make an effective particle beam weapon," one of the systems being researched.

The Europeans' role in Star Wars is considered central to its success. Soviet officials recently attacked the program while visiting European capitals, a move Washington viewed as an effort to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its European allies. If the Pentagon ultimately extends research contracts to European companies, attempts to separate U.S. and European interests on Star Wars probably would be less successful, administration officials reason.

Pentagon officials said there have been many expressions of interest from European companies in recent weeks. For example, Dornier G.m.b.H., a West German manufacturer, has inquired about working on tracking and pointing systems, and Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm G.m.b.H. is exploring the possibility of researching the use of high-energy lasers.

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